GOT THE COLD SHOULDER AGAIN?

YEAH, I DID. COME OFF IT.
NEITHER YOU NOR ISARASHA IS WILLING TO GIVE IN, HUH...
I GUESS ALL MY PERSISTENCE LED TO THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT I WANTED HAPPENING.
I THOUGHT, MAYBE HE WAS JUST PUTTING UP A FRONT, AND SOONER OR LATER HE'D COME AROUND TO IT.
BUT IN THE END I ONLY MADE THINGS WORSE.
BUT I'M NOT THE ONE WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY TO FIX HIM UP--WHICH IS WHY I IGNORED THE POSSIBILITY THAT IT'D HURT HIM.
WILLING TO GO THAT FAR, HUH?
IF I WERE YOU, I'D HAVE GIVEN UP AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
LION HEART
SHISHI. I'LL ADMIT IT. I WAS BEING A STUBBORN IDIOT.
TRUE THAT.
I MEAN, YOU WERE STUBBORN ENOUGH TO SPEND THREE YEARS IN A ROW AS A BENCH-WARMER AT THE HIGH SCHOOL WITH THE BEST BASKETBALL TEAM IN FUKUI, AFTER ALL.
THE READERS AREN'T SUPPOSED TO KNOW THAT!
MY BAD.
.....

DON'T GO DOING GROSS THINGS TO ME!
I STILL HAVEN'T GOTTEN OVER THAT COMMENT, HAVE I?
IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL...
IN MIDDLE SCHOOL...
NO MATTER WHERE I WENT, I COULDN'T GET ALONG WITH THE BOYS IN MY CLASS AND CONSTANTLY GOT INTO FIGHTS WITH THEM, SO I ENDED UP HATING ALL OF THEM.
I WENT THROUGH LIFE THINKING THEY WERE THE ENEMY.
BUT ONE EMERGED FROM THAT CROWD, AND FOUND HIS WAY INTO MY HEART...
Koi Inu
Chapter 16: The Other Side of the Hate

MARUTO!
OOKUMA-SENPAI?
Chiyoko Maruto (Middle School 2nd year)
WANNA WALK HOME TOGETHER?

HIS NAME WAS YUUYA OOKUMA.

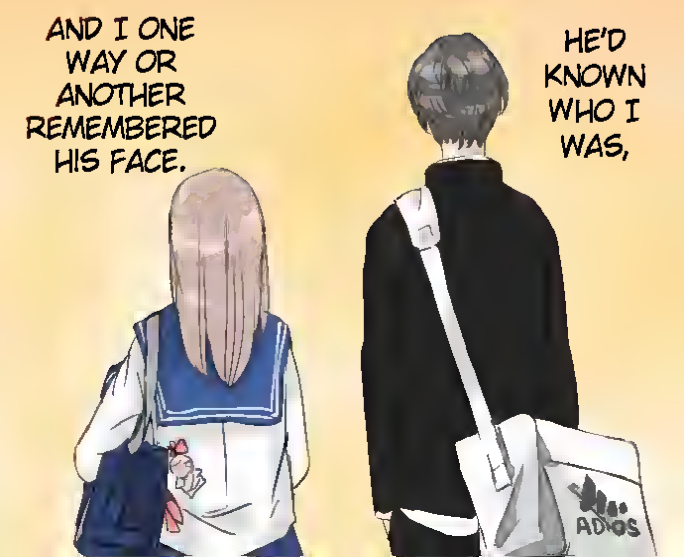
AHH, I'D KNOWN HE WAS THE VOLLEYBALL CAPTAIN.

IT WAS ON THE BUS THAT WE GOT TO KNOW EACH OTHER...

HE WAS ON THE VERGE OF FALLING ASLEEP AND MISSING OUR STOP, SO I WOKE HIM UP AND... THE REST IS HISTORY.

AND I ONE WAY OR ANOTHER REMEMBERED HIS FACE.

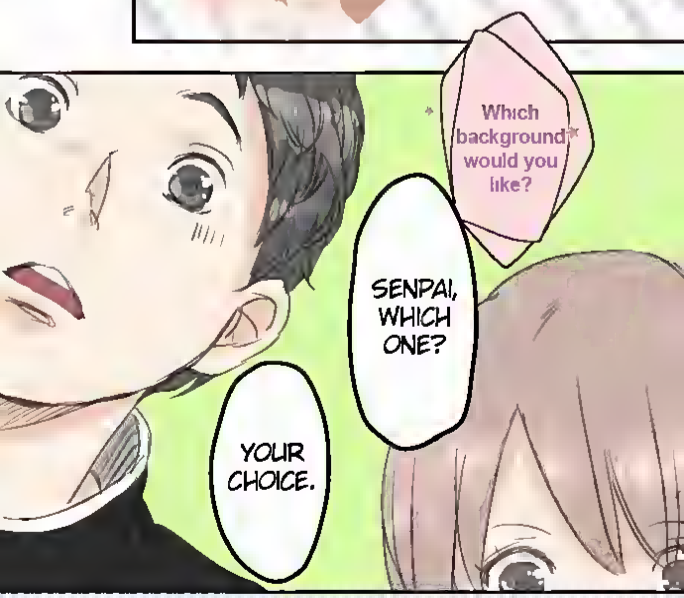
HE'D KNOWN WHO I WAS,



SOMETIMES WE WENT HOME TOGETHER, AND THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE TO IT, BUT...
WHEN I THINK ABOUT IT,
YOU'VE GOT A WEIRD NAME, "MARUTO".
IN THAT MOMENT, IT FELT LIKE WE'D KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR A LONG TIME.
IT'S A LAME NAME. I'M NOT REALLY FOND OF IT.
SOME GUY NOTICED THAT IT MEANT "ROUND", SO THE NICKNAME MY HEAD. "MARU" STUCK.
DON'T PAY ATTENTION TO THOSE JERKS.
CHIYOKO MARUTO.
THE "TO" IN MARUTO CAN BE READ AS "HOSHI". ARE ROUND, TOO, AREN'T THEY?
HOSHI MEANS STAR, AND STARS
AND EVERY NIGHT, YOU CAN SEE THOUSANDS OF STARS TWINKLING.
HAHA, HOW WAS THAT?
PRETTY COOL JUST NOW, WASN'T I?
TOO STUNNED BY MY CHARM TO TALK?
NOT REALLY...
OOKUMA-SENPAI KIND OF... REMINDED ME OF IGARASHI.
WHICH ONE SHOULD WE DO?
IT DOESN'T MATTER.

Cute

Choose a mode ♪


Which background would you like?
SENPAI, WHICH ONE?
YOUR CHOICE.

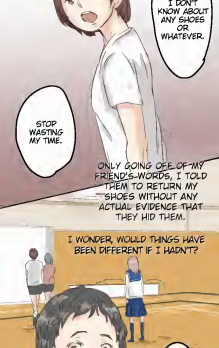
ピロリ～ン

I THOUGHT I COULD FINALLY STOP THINKING ABOUT THE CHILDHOOD FRIEND WHO WAS NO LONGER HERE,

AND TREASURED THE TIME I COULD SPEND WITH SOMEONE AT MY SIDE IN THE PRESENT.

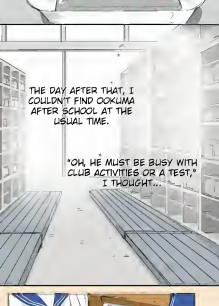
I THOUGHT ON IT CAREFULLY.

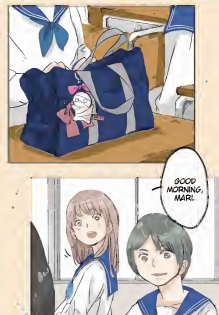
I DECIDED TO TRY TO BE DIPLOMATIC ABOUT IT AND TO DE-ESCALATE THE SITUATION.

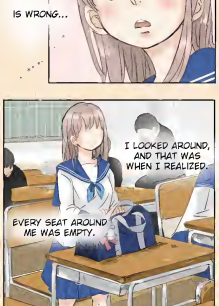


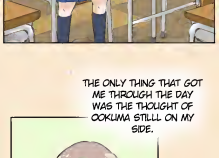
ONLY GOING OFF OF MY FRIENDS-WORDS, I TOLD THEM TO RETURN MY SHOES WITHOUT ANY ACTUAL EVIDENCE THAT THEY HID THEM.

MARUTO...
?


I EVENTUALLY FOUND MY SHOES AMONG THE CLEANING SUPPLIES FOR THE GIRLS BATHROOM.


THE DAY AFTER THAT, I COULDN'T FIND OOKUMA AFTER SCHOOL AT THE USUAL TIME.
"OH, HE MUST BE BUSY WITH CLUB ACTIVITIES OR A TEST," I THOUGHT...


GOOD MORNING, MARI.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SOMETHING...

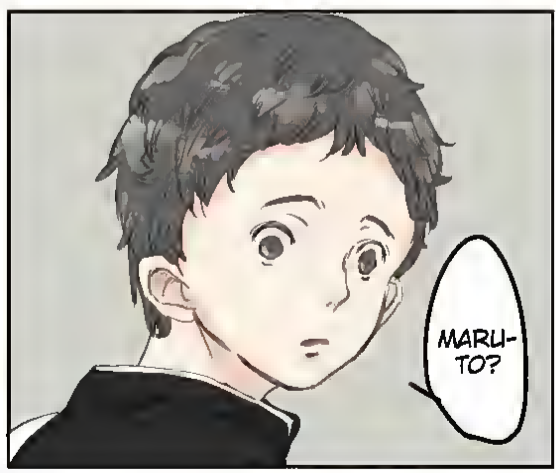
IS WRONG...

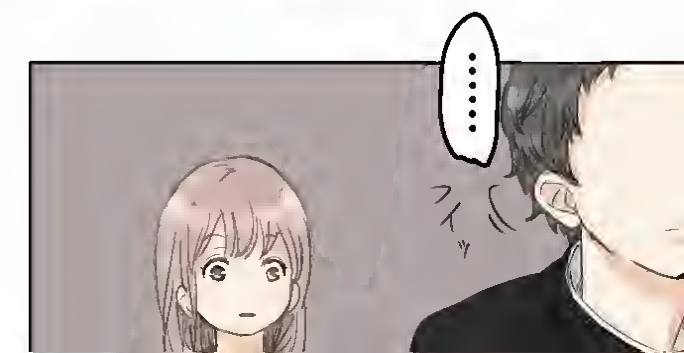
I LOOKED AROUND, AND THAT WAS WHEN I REALIZED.
EVERY SEAT AROUND ME WAS EMPTY.

THE ONLY THING THAT GOT ME THROUGH THE DAY WAS THE THOUGHT OF OOKUMA STILL ON MY SIDE.

IF I HAD AT LEAST ONE PERSON BY MY SIDE, I COULD SURVIVE ANYTHING.

AREN'T WE GOING HOME TOGETHER?


MARU-TO?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I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU AROUND LATELY. BUSY WITH CLUBS OR TESTS OR SOMETHING?
I
WAS THINKING ABOUT WHICH HIGH SCHOOL TO GO TO, AND I
WANT TO GO TO THE SAME ONE AS YOU.
I APOLOGIZE I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY TO YOU.
EH
WHY?
I'M NOT ACCEPTING THAT!
NO! IF YOU'RE GOING TO SAY HOW CAN THAT THEN I UNDER- STAND WHEN YOU SAY THAT ALL OF A SUDDEN!
GIVE ME A REASON!
.....
I HEARD FROM THE GIRLS.
DON'T YOU ALREADY HAVE SOMEONE YOU LIKE AT A DIFFERENT SCHOOL?
PLEASE STAY WITH HIM AND DON'T TURN ME INTO A SIDE FLING.

HEY!
WHICH ONE OF THE GIRLS SAID THAT!? I DON'T HAVE ANYONE LIKE THAT!
!
YOU DID IT, DIDN'T YOU? WITH HIM.

AT THE TIME, RUMORS COULD SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE.

NO MATTER HOW BASELESS IT WAS, I GOT CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF ONE...

IF I'D SPOKEN UP MORE, MAYBE... HE MIGHT HAVE BELIEVED IN ME AGAIN. BUT FOR SOME REASON I DIDN'T... BECAUSE...

IGA-RASHI ...

IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT.

IN A LITTLE NOOK IN MY HEART, HE STILL HELD A PRESENCE.

to be continued...

THE CAROLUS MENGUS TRANSLATION GROUP